
A
BRIEF VIEW
OF THE
NECESSITY AND TRUTH
OF THE
Christian Revelation.

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WE HAVE NOT FOLLOWED CUNNINGLY DEvised
FABLES. 2 Pet. c. i. v. 16.

BY
THOMAS HARTWELL HORNE.

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1800.

BRIEF VIEW

OF THE

NECESSITY AND TRUTH

OF THE

Christian Religion

BY
THOMAS HASTINGS HORNE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

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THE REV. JOHN HENRY
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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following pages were originally notes made while perusing some writers on this subject: and, to say the truth, the first section consists almost wholly of an analysis, or abridgment, of Dr. Leland's learned and elaborate work on the " Advantage and " Necessity of the Christian Revelation, shown from the State of " Religion in the ancient Heathen " World," published in 1768, in two volumes 8vo. The materials
of

of the second section the Author has selected principally from the Scriptures ; referring, however, occasionally, to such works as might afford any light in the history of Christianity. He at first doubted whether to insert *all* the numerous references to the writers, both sacred and profane, who are cited ; but, on a second consideration, he has inserted them, as exactly as possible, for the satisfaction of those whom curiosity, or any other motive, may induce to examine them. He arrogates to himself no literary excellence, but

has attempted to state facts, plainly and truly, as they happened, avoiding all speculative reasoning and rash conclusions.

In submitting his little work to the candour of the Public, he cannot but feel some degree of anxiety; yet he means not to deprecate the severity of criticism, or to urge his youth as an apology for the errors that may be detected. He has stepped forward in the defence of our common faith, and to oppose the rapid progress which the disciples of infidelity are making

ing, by disseminating their pernicious principles, particularly among the junior part of the present generation. Should his endeavours be crowned with the least success, he will be amply compensated; and the recollection of it will cheer him amidst all the vicissitudes of life.

Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn,

July 16, 1800.

BRIEF

BRIEF VIEW
OF THE
NECESSITY AND TRUTH
OF THE
CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

IT is by no means my intention, in the following pages, to discuss every objection that has been urged against the Christian Revelation; that has been already done by abler pens than mine, and would, moreover, require the compass of many volumes;—but

B

to

to convey to those, whom prejudice or a false system of education has precluded from the knowledge of the Christian faith, a brief and comprehensive view of the necessity and truth of the Christian Revelation.

In order to do this the more effectually, I will first exhibit the necessity of the Christian Revelation, shown from a view of the state of religion in the ancient heathen world, and then prove from the Old Testament, as well as from profane authors, both friendly and inimical to Christianity, that there was a person named Jesus Christ, and that the books which we have, written by his disciples,

disciples, concerning his doctrines and actions, may be depended upon as containing a true statement of them, and as holding forth to mankind the only way to salvation.

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SECT. I.

The Necessity of the Christian Revelation, as shown from a short View of the State of Religion in the ancient Heathen World.

WHOEVER reflects on the frame of human nature, cannot but be convinced that man is a religious creature, that is, a being possessing faculties, which are capable (by means of reflection and proper instruction) of attaining to, and are designed for religion; by which is to be understood that duty which every rational creature owes to its Almighty Creator and Benefactor. If we contemplate the inferior animals,

mals, we shall find, that they are every way calculated for the different offices and enjoyments of sensitive life. It is true that the brute creation has sensations. It has also some remembrance of natural good or evil, which it has experienced at the approach of a particular object, and the impression of which, being awakened by the presence of that object, leads beasts necessarily to avoid or seek it quickly. But do they possess that weak spark of divine fire which animates man, and which constitutes the noblest and the finest prerogative of the human soul; from which we can infer, that brutes are capable of conceiv-

ing any ideas or notions of God, or of the duties enjoined by religion? On the contrary, although man participates in a corporeal part, and animal powers, in common with the inferior creatures, which adapt him to the relishing and enjoying of sensible good, yet he has within him an internal faculty or power, a mind, which is, doubtless, the noblest part of his constitution, the criterion by which we are to judge of his principal end and highest happiness, and which constitutes his chief distinction and pre-eminence over the brute creation.

“ Man,” says a noble writer, who cannot be suspected of being friendly

friendly to superstition, " is not
 " only born to virtue, friendship,
 " honesty, and faith, but to reli-
 " gion, piety, and a generous sur-
 " render of his mind to what hap-
 " pens from the supreme cause,
 " or order of things, which he
 " acknowledges entirely just, and
 " perfect*."

" Man," says another eminent
 writer of the same principles, " is
 " a religious as well as a social
 " creature, made to know and
 " adore his Creator, to discover
 " and obey his will†. Greater
 " powers of reason," continues

* Shaftesbury's Characteristics, vol. iii. p. 224,
 5th edit.

† Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 470, ed. 4to.

he, “ and means of improvement
“ have been measured out to us,
“ than to other animals, that we
“ might be able to fulfil the supe-
“ rior purposes of our destination,
“ whereof religion is undoubtedly
“ the chief; and that in these the
“ elevation and pre-eminence of
“ our species over the inferior ani-
“ mals consists *.”

It is clear, then, that man had
an intelligent and wise Author of
his being, from which it may be
reasonably concluded, that man
was originally formed and de-
signed for religion. And, indeed,
what can be more absurd than to

* Bolingbroke's Works, vol. v. p. 340, 390,
ed. 4to.

suppose

suppose beings who possess reason and *intelligence* to proceed from a blind and *unintelligent* cause? If man were originally formed and intended for religion, it is by no means dissonant to reason to think, that, whenever the Almighty created man, he immediately enabled him to answer this end of his being, and his entering on a religious life. It were absurd, indeed, to suppose, that when the Almighty created man, he gave him only faculties and powers which adapt him to religion, but left him wholly to himself to acquire the knowledge of religion and of his duty, by the mere force of his own unassisted reason and experience:
for,

for, had that been the case, and man had been left in his infancy wholly to himself, destitute of any one to cherish and support him, immediate misery and death must have ensued; and supposing that by the mere strength of his constitution he had subdued these difficulties, it would have been long, very long, even if he possessed the most acute natural abilities, before he would raise his thoughts to things spiritual and invisible, and attain so perfect a knowledge of the works of nature, as to infer thereby the existence of the one only true God and his infinite perfections: by which means he must of necessity be destitute of all religion,

ligion, and utterly incapable of fulfilling the highest end of his being: for, as Montésquieu has most justly observed, “ it is clear, “ that, in a state of nature, man’s “ first ideas would not be of a speculative kind: he would first “ think of the preservation of his “ own being, before he investigated his original*.” The most reasonable supposition is, that the first man was formed in an adult state; and this is, according to the Mosaic account true in fact.

The history which we have of the creation of the world, and of the events connected with it, by

* Spirit of Laws, vol. i. book 1. chap. 2.

Moses,

Moses, contains (especially if compared with the ridiculous hypotheses of the ancients, as delivered down to us by their philosophers, poets, and historians) the best and most authentic account which we can any where find. What harmony and unity appear conspicuous through the whole, as opposed to the vague and uncertain accounts which we read in ancient heathen writers! a circumstance which alone, notwithstanding all the cavils and objections that have been urged against it, is a manifest proof that Moses was an inspired writer. In this account he relates succinctly the creation of the world and of our first

first parents, their situation in Eden, and the events immediately connected with it. He also, among many other things, introduces Adam speaking of the law of marriage, a circumstance which necessarily supposes a revelation from the Almighty respecting that and many other institutions. This we are accordingly given to understand in more than one passage, and especially in that, where, after our first parents had disobeyed the express command of God, and thereby forfeited all their title to his favour, Adam conceals himself in the Garden of Eden, and is called by the voice of the Lord*.

* Genesis, chap. iii.

He is questioned concerning the cause of his concealment: an explanation ensues, and the consequence is the merited expulsion of our first parents from the Garden of Eden. Yet even here the mercy of the Almighty was shown to them, and he still continued to impart to them his commands, and also to those of their descendants who obeyed them with sincerity and truth (of which Enoch is an instance, “who walked with God, “and was, for his piety, relieved “from the pains of death*”): for, in proportion as men increased, they increased, with the exception of a few, in wickedness; info-

* Genesis, chap. v. ver. 24.

much that the Almighty was provoked to destroy all mankind with a deluge, from which Noah alone and his family escaped through the goodness of God.

Here commences a new æra in the history of mankind; and we behold in Noah the second parent of the human race; who being, as we are informed by Moses, a man of the strictest piety, would not, we may conclude, permit his children to be ignorant of the origin of man, and of the history of the world previous to the flood. Of these he was the better able to inform them, as he had lived six hundred years with Methuselah, who was cotemporary with Adam about two hundred

dred and forty-five years; so that we may reasonably infer, he would procure the most authentic information respecting those important events, and of the original principles of religion delivered to our first parents; also that he retained every important point in the ancient religion, to which may be added the revelation of the divine will, with which, we are assured by Moses, he was favoured, in order to be communicated by him to his descendants.

The arts and sciences known previously to the flood, having been generally lost together with their inventors, and those who exercised them, the men who
lived

lived in the ages immediately succeeding that event and the dispersion of mankind, could not make any progress in them. The whole world lay before them, and many would naturally wander abroad in search of habitations ; who, removing to countries far distant from their first settlement, would gradually fall into a rude, uncivilized life, and almost wholly lose the idea of the one true God. The universal deluge is a circumstance that could not be easily forgotten ; and we accordingly find no event, in the ancient world, that has been handed down to us better attested than this. The tradition of it has spread through the whole world,

from the continent of Asia to that of America, from the East to the West Indies, among the rude inhabitants of Africa, and the Europeans*. But it was in the East, where Noah and his family settled immediately after the flood, that men assembled together, and first formed societies and kingdoms, erected cities, and cultivated the arts and sciences, and the most valuable reliques of ancient learning were found, which were still further handed down by tradition, after the manner of the Eastern nations, until the ages when the Grecian philosophers, poets, and

* See Grotius de Veritate Religionis Christianæ, l. 1. § 16. in notis.

legislators travelled thither for the attainment of the knowledge of things divine and human, and in order to be instructed in the science of legislation; as we are informed by Diodorus Siculus, Herodotus, and others. There too the worship of the one true God, some vestiges of which may be traced up to the most recondite periods of antiquity, continued pure and unsophisticated, long after the rest of mankind were plunged into the grossest rudeness, ignorance, and idolatry.

Among the nations which have shone most conspicuously in ancient times, were the Assyrians and Chaldæans, the Persians,

Phœnicians, Arabians, and Egyptians ; all, or at least the majority, of whom preserved the worship of the one true God, for several ages after the flood *. Of these, the ancient Persians appear to have adored the one Supreme Being in the earliest times, as their posterity, the Guebres, or Ghaurs, do to this day ; although for a while their ancestors fell into Zabiism, or the worship of the heavenly bodies, which imputation their early attachment to the science of astronomy seems to have occa-

* See Shuckford's *Connexion of sacred and profane History*, vol. i. p. 282, &c.

sioned.

fioned*. As to the Assyrians, they appear from the Holy Scriptures to be among the first corrupters of the true ancient religion†; and we are informed also by Moses, that the Phœnicians and Canaanites professed polytheism, or the worship of a plurality of gods in his days, although, as it has been frequently observed from the same illustrious prophet, we find no traces of idolatry among them four hundred years before, when Abraham resided with them: the contrary is evident, from the

* Ancient Universal History, vol. v. book 1. c. 11. § 3. where the ancient Persians are fully acquitted of this charge.

† Joshua, chap. xxiv. ver. 2.

conduct of Abraham towards Melchisedek a king of that country, who is styled, in more than one passage in the scriptures, "the Priest of the Most High God." The same observation holds with regard to the Egyptians, who, far from disturbing Abraham on account of his religious principles, appear, from the relation of Moses, to have regarded him rather as a prophet of the Most High, and as his peculiar favourite. The Egyptians, at least part of them, appear to have long retained the worship of the one Supreme, the Creator of all things, whom they adored at Thebes under the name of Kneph, or Ecneph, while other parts

parts of Egypt were involved in the most absurd idolatry *. With respect to the Arabians, they seem to have worshipped the one true God for many ages, as appears from that most noble monument of antiquity, the book of Job, in which it is, however, hinted that Zabiism, or the worship of the heavenly bodies, was about to be introduced.

From this it appears, that in the eastern nations the primitive religion continued longer, and more pure than in other Pagan countries; though among them, the idea respecting the one true

* Vid Plutarch. de Osirid. et Isid.

God does not seem to have been wholly obliterated, as is evident from the testimonies of the most celebrated heathen philosophers*.

Nor is this tradition lost among the inhabitants of the most barbarous lands; but, what one would least expect, is better attested there, than in nations celebrated for the perfection to which they carried the arts and sciences. The Hottentots, for

* See particularly Aristot. de Mundo, c. 6. in Oper. p. 610. ed. 1629. Plat. de Leg. p. 600. in Oper. ed. 1598. Plutarch. Op. vol. ii. p. 369. B. ed. 1620. Cic. de Leg. l. 2. c. 7. Tuscul. Quest. l. 1. c. 28. See also the Divine Legation of Moses, vol. i. b. 2. § 3. pp. 112, &c. and 127, 128. 4. ed.

instance,

instance, and the negroes of Guinea, both acknowledge one Supreme Being, but believe he is too far above us to take notice of us, and therefore they pay him no kind of homage or worship; but they adore, the former an evil spirit, the latter a multitude of other deities. It is to be observed, that the genius and notions of these people are so confined, that their ideas respecting a Supreme Being can be scarcely supposed to proceed from their own reasoning, but must be derived from the remains of some ancient tradition handed down to them by their ancestors, of whose opinions and

4 customs

customs they are very tenacious*. The same observation will apply, in part at least, to the different tribes of India, according to the ancient and modern accounts of that country †, to the inhabitants of the Isle of Ceylon in the East Indies ‡, the North Americans §, and the Peruvians, before the Incas civilized them, as we are informed by Garcilasso de la Vega.

* Kolben's Account of the Cape of Good Hope, vol. i. c. 8; and Bosmann's Account of Guinea.

† Philipps's Account of the Religion, &c. of the People of Malabar.

‡ Ibid.

§ Joseph d'Acosta de procuranda Indorum Salute, l. 5. p. 475. folio ed. See also Lafitau's Mœurs de Sauvages.

From

From this it appears, that there are traces of the belief of one supreme Deity, among almost every individual nation in the whole world, even the most barbarous; which can only be ascribed to the remains of an ancient religion, which was handed down from the first parents of mankind traditionally. But, in the course of time, this venerable doctrine became so obscured, as to be almost imperceptible, from the multiplicity of idolatries, with which it was covered. While some nations who pretended to acknowledge a Supreme Being, paid him no worship at all, others confounded his worship with that of idol-deities,

great

great numbers of which being introduced from time to time, and sanctioned by public authority, so diverted the people's attention from the worship of the one true God, that, as hath been most justly observed, "in the crowd of wrong
 " notions, and inventions of rites,
 " the world had almost lost sight
 " of the only true God*." Such was the state of religion among mankind at the time our Saviour appeared about eighteen hundred years ago; so that there was great need of some extraordinary divine interposition to bring men back from it.

* Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, in his works, vol. ii. p. 530, 531.

But

But we are not to suppose, that on the separation and dispersion of mankind over the whole face of the earth, when men first assembled together, and formed societies and nations, they fell suddenly into this gross superstition. This is by no means the case; it will not, therefore, I trust, be improper, if, before I conclude this head, I notice some of the chief gradations, which effected this perversion of mankind from the right knowledge and worship of the only true God, and diffused it so universally among men, and especially those heathen nations, amidst whom the arts and sciences have

have made the greatest advances towards perfection.

The first corruption of religion, and deviation from the worship of the one true God, was, as we are informed by Moses, the worship of heaven and the heavenly bodies. This account of that illustrious prophet is corroborated by the united testimony of other ancient writers*. The Egyptians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, seem to have been the first nations who followed this superstitious worship. In the first ages of the world, men chiefly followed the pastoral life. That way of living

* Diodor. Sicul. l. i. Eusebii Præparatio Evangelica, l. i. c. 9.

afforded

afforded them both leifure and opportunity to obferve the ftars and their influences; and we accordingly find that they applied themfelves very early to judicial aftronomy. By indulging their fpeculations, they gradually came to regard the heavenly bodies as intelligent beings, and to pay to them, and particularly to the fun*, that worfhip which was due to the only true God. Thofe nations were followed by the ancient Arabians† and the Perfians‡, who very early fell into the practice of

* Eufebii Præparatio Evangelica, l. i. c. 10.

† Job, chap. xxxi. ver. 26, 28.

‡ Ancient Univerfal History, vol. v. l. i.

c. 11. § 3.

paying

paying their worship to the sun, moon, and stars; but this latter nation was afterwards reclaimed to the worship of the one true God.

From these nations this superstition was introduced among the Greeks*, and the other nations of the West, principally by the philosophers, who travelled into the East, and those legislators, who in the early ages emigrated thence, and carried with them their knowledge and religion, and civilized the rude inhabitants of the western hemisphere. The ancient Indian Brahmins also, as we are

* Platon. Oper. p. 263. B. ed. 1590. Aristot. Metaphys. l. 14. c. 8. in vol. ii. Operum, p. 1003. ed. Paris. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2. c. 2.

informed

informed by Philostratus, and the Chinese both ancient and modern*, adore the sun, moon, and stars; as likewise do the Tonquinese, as Tavernier informs us, and the Eastern Tartars†. The Libyans worshipped only the sun and moon‡; but the Massagetæ§ worshipped the sun alone, to whom they immolated a horse. The same planet was also worshipped by the Mexicans, Peruvians, and the inhabitants of the Terra Firma in America, those of New Gra-

* Navarette's Account of China, in Churchill's Voyages, vol. i. p. 74, 84, 85.

† Grimston's States and Empires, p. 701.

‡ Herod. l. 4. c. 188.

§ Strab. b. 11.

nada, the Canary and Philippine Islands, the ancient nations of Africa, and the ancient Gauls, Germans, and other nations of Europe*.

Thus have I endeavoured to give a succinct view of that first corruption of the worship of the only true God, "the worship of "the Host of Heaven", as it is emphatically styled in scripture, which I cannot better conclude than by adding the accurate delineation of it which the elegant author of the Book of Wisdom

* Millar's History of the Propagation of Christianity, vol. ii. where the religion of these nations is fully considered.

has given us : “ Surely,” says he,
 “ vain are all men by nature, who
 “ are ignorant of God, and could
 “ not out of the good things that
 “ are seen, know him that is :
 “ neither by considering the
 “ works did they consider the
 “ workmaster ; but deemed either
 “ fire or wind, or the swift air,
 “ or the circle of the stars, or
 “ the violent water, or the lights
 “ of heaven, to be the gods
 “ which govern the world. With
 “ whose beauty, if they, being
 “ delighted, took them to be
 “ gods, let them know, how
 “ much better the Lord of them
 “ is : for the first author of beau-
 “ ty hath created them. But if
 D 2 “ they

“ they were astonished at their
 “ power and virtue, let them un-
 “ derstand, by them, how much
 “ mightier he is, that made them;
 “ for by the greatness and beauty
 “ of the creation, proportionably
 “ the Maker of them is seen*.”

A second kind of idolatry which
 weaned men from the worship of
 the one true God, was the adora-
 tion which they paid to men, and
 heroes, who, for their virtues, or
 the benefits conferred by them on
 mankind, were deified, and had
 pillars and statues consecrated,
 and festivals dedicated to them †.

* Wisd. chap. xiii. ver. 1—5.

† Euseb. Præpar. Evangel. l. 2. c. 9.

These

These statues and pillars appear to have been intended originally merely for their honour, but afterwards became religious ceremonies, and men gradually regarded and adored them as deities. This worship prevailed very early among the ancient heathens, as we are informed by the author of the Book of Wisdom, who, alluding to this custom, says: “ Thus in process of time an un-
 “ godly custom, grown strong,
 “ was kept as a law, and graven
 “ images were worshipped by the
 “ commandment of kings*.” It appears from the united testimony

* Wisd. chap. xiv. ver. 16.

of ancient heathen writers*, that most of the chief objects of pagan worship had been originally men, the principal of whom, Jupiter, was honoured (as were also, though in a less degree, the other deities) with the names and attributes of the only true God, to whom, however, they did not hesitate to ascribe the most criminal and indecent actions†. It has been asserted, that the pagan polytheism was only the worshipping of the one

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2. c. 15 and 23. Cic. Tusc. Quæst. l. 1. c. 12, 13. Hesiod. Theogon. v. 453 & seq.

† Plaut. Amphitruo, in Prolog. v. 23, 45, 139. Act. 5. scen. 1. lin. 64. Ovid. Metamorph. l. 2. v. 402, 850, 1.

Supreme Being under various appellations ; but this hypothesis has been most ably examined, and refuted, by Dr. Leland, who has fully proved, that the Jupiter Capitolinus of the Romans was not the true God, but the chief of the pagan deities *. The ancients, it is to be observed, in their addresses to their deities, invoked them at first under a variety of names and epithets, which they imagined were gratifying to them, but afterwards adored those names as so many distinct and separate gods †.

* Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation shown from the State of Religion in the ancient Heathen World, vol. i. p. 116—123.

† Selden, de Diis Syris, Proleg. c. 3.

Another cause of the progress of idolatry among mankind is the conversion of the symbols and images of the gods into the gods themselves*; to which may be added their physiology. Their physiologers, or those who first began to philosophize on the nature of things, were principally poets, who made deities of the things of nature, of parts of the universe, and of every thing that was beneficial, and even things and animals hurtful and pernicious to mankind†.

* Plutarch. Oper. vol. ii. p. 379. D. E. Philonis Oper. p. 755. E.

† Cicero de Nat. Deor. l. 2. c. 14. l. 1. c. 15. l. 2. c. 23. l. 3. c. 25. Cicero, de Leg. l. 2. c. 11. Plin. Hist. Nat. l. 2. c. 7.

Not content with “ crumbling,” according to Dr. Cudworth, “ the “ one simple Deity into several “ parts, and multiplying it into “ many gods* ;” they supposed the Almighty to be all things, and consequently to be adored in every thing, and even paid their devotions to evil beings†, in which practice they are followed by several nations in Asia, Africa, and America, which have not yet received the gospel‡.

Much has been urged in favour of the ancient mysteries, but at

* Cudworth's Intellectual System, p. 532.
Herbert de Religione Gentilium, p. 133, 134.

† Plutarch. Oper. vol. ii. p. 361, 362, 880.

‡ Millar's Hist. of the Propagation of Christianity, vol. ii. c. 7.

best they could only promote the practice of virtues merely social, and deter men from such practices as might be obnoxious, or hurtful to society *. In the course of time they became greatly corrupted, and consequently could not but have a bad effect on the people †, and tend to confirm them in their idolatrous practices: this evil was not a little increased by the ambiguity and obscurity which the

* See the "Advantage and Necessity of the Christian Revelation, vol. i. c. 8. where this is amply discussed."

† Divine Legation of Moses, vol. i. l. 2. § 4. p. 195. Arnobius adversus Gentes, l. 5. passim.

ancient

ancient philosophers affected*, and which could not but incapacitate them for teaching the people religion, by their generally expressing themselves in a polytheistic strain†, and addressing a plurality of deities even in their most serious discourses. This, their conduct, they defended, and justified with

* Dr. Leland's Advantage and Necessity, &c. vol. i. c. 11.

† Divine Legation of Moses, vol. i. l. 2. § 3. p. 112. Xenophon. Memorabilia Socratis, l. 4. § 19. Platon. Oper. p. 664. ed. 1590. Cicero de Nat. Deor. l. 2. c. 4. l. 3. c. 3. Cicero Tuscul. Disput. l. 1. c. 13. Cicero de Legibus, l. 1. c. 7. l. 2. c. 7. Senec. Epistol. 117. Epictet. Enchiridion. c. 38. Epictet. Dissertat. l. 1. c. 1. § 2. c. 29. § 3. l. 4. c. 4. § 6. Antonin. Meditation. l. 2. § 11. and many other passages dispersed through the whole of that Emperor's meditations.

all

all their abilities and learning, recommending the worship of inferior gods, under the pretence that it tended to the honour of the Supreme*, palliating the most absurd and ridiculous parts of their poetical theology, by allegorizing the most indecent fables†, apologizing for the ridiculous worship of animals by the Egyptians‡, and even urging idolatries, absurd in the extreme, as being necessary to deter the people from irreligion and atheism§.

Thus have I attempted to exhibit a succinct account of the more

* Advantage and Necessity, &c. vol. i. c. 16. throughout.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

§ Ibid.

remarkable

remarkable gradations, by which was effected the total alienation* of men's minds from the worship of the one true God, and their giving of themselves up to idolatry and uncleanness; so that the whole world "lay in wickedness†;" and from this, I trust, that whoever peruses this brief view of the ancient religion, cannot but be convinced of the necessity of an immediate divine revelation to reclaim mankind from such gross superstition

* I except from this account the ancient Persians and the Jews, who (though it must be confessed that they fell very early into idolatry, yet they were reclaimed) worship to this day the one Supreme God.

† 1 John, v. 19.

and

and idolatry ; and that such revelation could not be unfolded to men better, than by some divine person, or at least one, who should not only be a man of the most exemplary piety and charity, but a teacher, and who should set an example of universal benevolence. Such a teacher and prophet (if I may use the expression) was found in the person of the Institutor of our most holy religion, who not only voluntarily relinquished the joys of heaven to reclaim mankind from their wickedness, to effect which he performed the most signal miracles, but also meekly submitted himself to be executed ignominiously as a criminal, for their redemption.

demption. How thankful, then, ought we to be for the salutary light afforded us by his word ! With what gratitude ought we to offer up our praises and thanksgivings to the Almighty, for the advantages we enjoy in the possession of the holy scriptures, to direct and console us amidst all the vicissitudes of life !

SECT.

SECT. II.

The Existence of our Saviour proved from the united Testimonies of Authors both friendly and inimical to the Christian Revelation.

THIS is a circumstance, which is confessed not only by the whole class of Christians of every sect, who are dispersed throughout the whole world; but also by the Jews, especially by their prophets, who foretold the coming of Christ very many years before he appeared, as might be shown from numberless passages from the Old Testament, and by several ancient writers, both
Pagan

Pagan and Christian. The Christians derive their name expressly from him. "Auctor nominis ejus Christus," says Tacitus, "qui Tiberio imperitante per Pro-
 "curatorem Pontium Pilatum
 "supplicio affectus erat. i. e. The
 "author of that name was Christ,
 "who was put to death in the
 "reign of Tiberius, by Pontius
 "Pilate, the Procurator (of Ju-
 "dea)*." This testimony of Ta-
 "citus is confirmed by the re-

* Tacit. Annal. l. 15. c. 44. They first received this name at Antioch, as we are informed by Suidas (in voce Χριστιανοί), about the end of Claudius's reign, who banished them from Rome. "Judæos impulsore Christo assidue tumultuantes Româ expulit." Suetonius in Claudio. c. 25.

E

peated

peated references, or appeals, which are made by the early apologists* for Christianity to the acts of Pilate; that is, those memoirs or accounts of his transactions, which took place during his government, which he, as well as other procurators, or governors, transmitted to Rome. The authenticity of these acts of Pilate is yet further confirmed, in that they have never been controverted or called into question by the most inveterate adversaries of Christianity; but, on the contrary, they are frequently cited with approbation, especially by the Emperor

* Especially Justin Martyr, p. 76, and Tertullian. Apol. c. 21.

Julian, and some others, who take occasion from thence to revile the followers of Christ.

The Jews, who lived soon after those times, therefore, as we are informed by Buxtorf, called our Saviour the man that was hanged; that is, suspended on the cross. There is also a passage in Lucian, in which he reviles the Christians for abandoning the magnificent worship of the Pagan gods, in order to adore, or worship, “an impostor, who had been crucified*.”

* ΤΟΝ ΔΕ ΑΝΕΣΧΟΛΟΠΙΣΜΕΝΟΝ ΕΧΕΙΝΟΝ ΣΟΦΙΣΤΗΝ ΑΥΤΩ ΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΩΣΙ. Lucian de morte per. p. 996. See also Josephus. Antiquit. l. 18. c. 3. who, though he was a Jew, bears an honourable testimony to the Christians.

Yet we do not find that the Christians were deterred, or intimidated by these reproaches from professing Christ. On the contrary, it appears from the gospels, as well as from other parts of the New Testament, that, both during Christ's life, and immediately after his death, there were immense numbers of persons, who professed his doctrines, and endured with the utmost constancy the extremest tortures, rather than they would deny him. Besides the Apostles, there are several of the ancient fathers (who lived very early after the passion of Christ) who confirm this; viz. Tatian, Irenæus, Tertullian, Eusebius, and, among

among many others, Origen, who bears the following noble testimony to the constancy and fortitude of the Christians: "They," says he, "rather chose to undergo
 "any torments than acknowledge
 "Jupiter to be God. For," continues he, "we do not regard Jupiter and Sabaoth (in Hebrew, the Lord of Hosts) as the same, nor do we consider Jupiter as any divinity at all; and if the Egyptians produce to us their Ammon, threatening us with death, we will die rather than call Ammon God*." To these may be added, the further testi-

* Origen. contr. Cels. l. 5. p. 262. Ed. Cantabr.

monies of Tacitus, and Suetonius, both eminent historians, who flourished about seventeen centuries since, who both agree in telling us that the Christians endured the greatest persecutions with wonderful constancy. “ There was,” says Tacitus, “ a very great multitude of Christians not only in Judea, but also in the city (Rome), whom Nero persecuted with such barbarous cruelty as excited even the compassion of their enemies*.”—“ The Christians,” says Suetonius, “ were severely tortured, a class of men professing a new and

* Tacit. Annal. l. 15. c. 44. Ed. Amstel. 1673.

“ pernicious

“ pernicious superstition*.” The younger Pliny, also, who was the friend of the Emperor Trajan, and employed to persecute the Christians, in a letter to that emperor, in which he gives them a most excellent character as to their meekness and moral behaviour, says, that “ many of every age and rank, and of both sexes, are infected with this superstition. That the contagion of it had penetrated not only the city, but also the villages.” He adds, that till he began to execute the laws against them, the temples

* Afflicti suppliciis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novæ “ et maleficæ.” Sueton. in Ner. c. 16.

were almost forsaken—" and the
 " solemn sacrifices for a long time
 " discontinued, and that there
 " could be scarcely found any to
 " purchase victims for them*."

This testimony is yet further confirmed by Tertullian, who says, with exultation, that every place, except the temples, were filled with the professors of Christianity: he adds, that if they were to retire, whole cities and provinces would be destitute of inhabitants †.

From the coincidence of the evangelists with the above-cited historians, it is clear, then, that

* Plin. Epist. l. 10. Ep. 97.

† Tertullian. Apol. c. 37.

there

there was a man named Jesus Christ, who was born in the reign of Augustus, and was crucified in that of Tiberius. It appears also, that Christ taught doctrines utterly subversive of the religious system then received; that by the most exemplary purity and holiness of his life, and the meekness and humility of his manners; his sublime and serious exhortations of mankind to repentance, insomuch that his most inveterate enemies were obliged to confess, that "never man spake like this man," and that "he taught as one having authority;" and above all, by the wonderful miracles he wrought, he fully manifested himself to be the

the Son of God : so that great multitudes, not only during his life, but also after his death, by the ministry of his disciples, the Apostles, believed on him, and professed his doctrines.

It is well known, that those who first propagated Christianity, wrote accounts of the life, doctrines, and miracles of their Lord and Master Jesus Christ. This is acknowledged by the most inveterate foes of Christianity, who, as we are informed by the early fathers, confess, that the Christians have books of a very ancient date, some coeval with the times to which they refer, and others written fifteen or sixteen centuries since; which contain

contain the principles of the Christian faith. We are also informed by the same writers, that several spurious works were published, and attributed to the Apostles; the consequence of which was, a critical investigation of them, and the establishment of the authenticity of those books, which now constitute the New Testament, especially that part of it called the Gospels, which were written by four of Christ's disciples, who are distinguished with the name of the Evangelists.

The chief writers in the New Testament, are, Matthew, John, Peter, Paul, and Luke, who was Paul's companion in all his travels
and

and dangers*; all of whom, except Paul (who was converted by Christ himself, after his ascension into heaven, in a most miraculous manner†), were the immediate disciples of Jesus Christ, so that they could not but be thoroughly informed of the truth of the facts they relate‡. The same remark will apply to James, who was either an apostle, or, as some will have§, very nearly related to our Lord; and was by the Apostles made Bishop of Jerusalem. They,

* Acts, c. xx. &c. Coloss. c. iv. v. 14.
 2 Tim. c. iv. v. 11. Philem. 24.

† Acts, c. ix. v. 1—9.

‡ John, c. xv. v. 27. Acts. c. i. v. 21, 22.
 1 John, c. i. v. 1.

§ Vid. Euseb. Hist. Eccl. l. 2. c. 21 and 23.

as well as the other writers of the New Testament, were all eye-witnesses of Christ's miracles, and the wonderful effect his preaching had on the people, and cannot therefore be suspected of having written any thing with an intent to deceive mankind ; especially as at the time they published their writings, very many witnesses were still living, who had not only beheld Christ himself performing those amiable and benevolent acts, which form the most prominent feature in his character (and which alone, one would think, must be a convincing proof of his divine mission), but had also actually beheld him alive again, after

1

his

his glorious resurrection*. And it would be absurd, not to say impossible, that so many should conspire to propagate a falsehood, especially at a time, when even to attend the ministers of Christ, much less to profess his faith, exposed them to the severest persecutions, and most imminent danger of their lives. Besides, it rarely happens that any one is guilty of a falsehood without having some advantage, either immediate or remote, in view. The first teachers of Christianity could have none. They could not aspire to honours, for all honour was at that time in

* "After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." 1. Cor. c. xv. v. 6.

the hands of the Jews and Heathens, who reviled and persecuted them with unrelenting severity. They could not expect to gain by it any worldly wealth, since their profession exposed their estate to diminution by excessive fines, if it were not wholly sequestered. They could not be prevailed upon by any temporal advantages or comforts to be guilty of a falsehood, nor could they expect any success in the propagation of their tenets, which were every where opposed by the ruling powers, unless they had some divine promise of it; and from their very great success, notwithstanding the numerous obstacles that concurred to retard them,

them, by the stoning of one*, the murder of another†, and the dispersion and repeated imprisonments of others, of the Apostles, it may be literally said, that “it was the finger of God‡,” and that “God was amongst them§.”

Except Paul (who was skilled in all the learning of the Jews||, and who, had he continued to follow the errors of his fathers, might not have despaired of attaining the highest honours, all which he renounced, and resolved to teach nought “save Jesus Christ, and

* Stephen, vid. Acts, c. vii. v. 59.

† James, who was beheaded. Acts, c. xii. v. 2.

‡ Exod. c. viii. v. 19.

§ 1 Cor. c. xiv. v. 25.

|| Acts, c. xxii. v. 3.

“ him

“ him crucified *,”) all the other Apostles were plain, illiterate men, and had, as they themselves frankly confess, followed the meanest occupations †, and been notorious evil livers ‡, who were utterly ignorant of languages, till the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them §, as their Divine Master promised them on his departure ||, who also conferred upon them

* 1 Cor. c. ii. v. 2.

† Matt. c. iv. v. 18—21. Luke, c. v. v. 10.

‡ Matt. c. ix. v. 10.

§ Acts, c. ii. v. 3, 4. c. x. v. 46. c. xix. v. 6.

1 Cor. c. xii. v. 10, 28, 30. c. xiii. v. 1, 8. c. xiv.

v. 2, 4—6, 9, 13, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 39.

|| John, c. xiv. v. 12, 16, 17. Mark, c. xvi. v. 17.

other miraculous powers*. Con-
 trary to the custom of those who
 go about repeating idle tales,
 which will not bear the test of
 truth, they detail their accounts of
 their Master's words, actions, and
 miracles, plainly, seriously, with-
 out affectation, and in a truly edi-
 fying and devout manner, frankly
 declaring every thing that came to
 their knowledge, and of which
 they themselves were eye-witnesses.
 And what cannot but reflect the
 highest honour on their integrity
 is, their noble confession respect-

* Acts, c. iii. v. 1—8. c. viii. v. 6—10.
 c. ix. v. 36—41. c. xiii. v. 9—11. c. xiv. v.
 8—10. c. xvi. v. 16—18. c. xix. v. 6. c. xx. v.
 9—11. 2 Cor. c. xii. v. 12. Hebr. c. ii. v. 4.

ing their Lord and Master, whose country they acknowledge to be universally despised*, whose birth and education was mean†, whose circumstances were indigent‡; that he was accused (notwithstanding the miracles he performed, and the purity and holiness of his life and manners), of the most heinous crimes§, and, finally, that he was hurried away by the joint fury of both rulers and subjects,

* John, c. i. v. 45—6.

† Luke, c. ii. v. 3—6. Matt. 13. v. 55. Mark, c. vi. v. 3.

‡ Matt. c. viii. v. 20. Luke c. viii. v. 3.

§ Matt. c. ix. v. 3, 26, 65. c. xi. v. 19. Luke, c. vii. v. 34. c. xxiii. v. 2. John, c. v. v. 16. c. vii. v. 20. c. viii. v. 48. c. ix. v. 16. c. x. v. 20, 31—38. c. xix. v. 12.

and put to death in the most ignominious manner *. All these circumstances, and many others respecting their disobedience to so benevolent a Master, and their contentions both during his life †, and after his death ‡, they narrate with the utmost impartiality, representing facts as they really happened, without any exaggeration, or diminution, nor heeding whether they passed “ through honour or “ dishonour, through evil report, “ or through good report §.”

These circumstances alone are

* Matt. c. xxvii. v. 32—4.

† Matt. c. xx. v. 20—8.

‡ Acts, c. xv. v. 37—39.

§ 2 Cor. c. vi. v. 8. Dr. Dodderidge's version.
convincing

convincing proofs of the truth of the Gospel, and of the facts therein recorded. Yet if any one were still inclined to dispute the truth of Christianity and the divine mission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to redeem mankind from sin and death, there remain some proofs to be adduced, which will, I trust, effectually obviate his doubts, and these are :

First, The great success of the Apostles during the whole of their mission, in healing diseases, recalling the dead to life, and, above all, the immense numbers of people who, as I have already hinted, embraced the Christian faith, notwithstanding the almost insuper-

able obstacles which opposed it, of which we have a complete account in that part of the New Testament called the Acts of the Apostles, which very early received the sanction of the most accurate critics in sacred literature of those times :

Secondly, The remarkable coincidence of the prophecies (which were uttered very many centuries before the appearance of Christ) with the New Testament, in which we find them literally accomplished ; and also the predictions concerning the sudden and vast propagation of Christianity, its perpetual duration, the rejection of it by many Jews, and the embracing of it by the Gentiles, the animosity of
of

of the Jews against the professors of Christianity, the very severe and barbarous persecutions they were to endure, and, lastly, concerning the siege and utter destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Temple, and the exquisite miseries the Jews were to undergo; and,

Thirdly, The miracles performed after the apostolic ages, particularly the casting out of demons, or evil spirits, by Christians.

First, The great success of the Apostles, during the whole course of their mission, in healing diseases, recalling the dead to life, and, above all, the immense numbers

bers of people who embraced the Christian faith, notwithstanding the almost insuperable obstacles which concurred to oppose it.

The first professors of Christianity were by no means merely ignorant or illiterate persons, who might be supposed to be hurried into a belief of Christ through a thoughtless enthusiasm; but we have instances of many persons of quality and rank, who possessed a sound judgment, and were not ignorant of letters; “men of steady
 “and thoughtful tempers, ready
 “to investigate the truth, and capable of judging of its evidences;” such as Sergius Paulus,

lus, Pro-consul of Cyprus*, Dionysius the Areopagite†, Polycarp, Justin, Irenæus, Athenagorus, Origen, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and many others, most of whom have been an ornament to Christianity, by their writings in its defence; almost all of whom were educated in other religious systems, and who cannot be supposed to have embraced Christianity (reviled and persecuted as it was), but from a firm conviction (arising from that diligent investigation which it is the duty of every thinking and considerate man to make in all af-

* Acts, c. xiii. v. 12.

† Acts, c. xvii. v. 34.

fairs of moment) that it was a true religion supported by the most convincing testimonies, which had increased exceedingly from the miracles which its first teachers, the Apostles and Disciples of Christ, had wrought; as healing by the voice alone, and publicly too, the most inveterate diseases, recalling the dead to life, casting out demons, and from many other miracles of a similar nature, which cannot be ascribed to any natural or infernal power, but must proceed wholly from God. For, as the Divine Founder of Christianity has most justly observed,

“ How can Satan cast out Satan?

“ Every kingdom divided against
“ itself

" itself cannot subsist, but is
 " brought to desolation: and
 " every city, or house, divided
 " against itself, cannot stand, but
 " falleth." And again, " If Sa-
 " tan rise up against himself and
 " cast out Satan, he is divided
 " against himself; how then shall
 " his kingdom subsist? He can-
 " not stand, but has a period*."

Nor was Christianity confined
 to the countries in the neighbour-
 hood of that where Christ himself
 taught; but was diffused through-
 out all Europe, not excluding the
 most northern parts†, through
 the whole extent of Asia, and also

* Matt. c. xii. v. 25, 26. Mark, c. iii. v.
 23—6. Luke.

† Vid. Grotius de veritate Religionis Chris-
 tiana, p. 134, & in not.

the islands situated in the Ocean, through Egypt, through Ethiopia, and some other parts of Africa; and that not only within these few centuries past, but also in the earlier ages of Christianity*, as appears not only from the councils of those times, but also from the writings of the Christians themselves, and most especially from an ancient tradition still preserved in the East, respecting the travels and miracles of St. Thomas, St. Andrew, and the other Apostles; Clement of Alexandria†, Tertullian‡, Irenæus§, Arnobius||, Atha-

* Vide Grotius de Veritate, &c. ubi supra.

† Stromat. l. 5.

‡ Tertullian adversus Judæos. l. 1.

§ Irenæus, l. 1. c. 3.

|| Arnobius adversus Gentes. l. 2.

nafius, Theodoret, and others*, afford us ample testimony how widely extended and celebrated the name of Jesus Christ was in Britain, Germany, and other remote countries. Nor is there to this day any country, even in those

* There is extant an epistle of Athanasius in Theodoret, l. 4. c. 3. in which he makes mention of the churches of Spain, Britain, Gaul, Italy, Dalmatia, Mysia, Macedonia, Greece, Africa, Sardinia, Cyprus, Crete, Pamphylia, Lycia, Isauria, Egypt, Libia, and Cappadocia. See also Theodoret adversus Græcos. ferm. 8. The same writer (ferm. 9.) reckons among the nations converted to Christianity, the Persians, Massagetæ, Hyrcanians, Caspians, and Scythians, vid. also Origen in Homil. ad Ezekiel. 4. and Chrysostom. Homil. 6. ad 1 Ep. ad Corinthios; besides which, there are many others, to cite whom would be tedious, if not unnecessary.

in

in which the all-destroying religion of Mahomet is most prevalent, in which there are not to be found many followers of Christ.

Secondly, The remarkable coincidence of the prophecies (which were uttered, and published very many centuries before the appearance of Christ), with the accounts, which we have of him in the New Testament, in which we find them literally fulfilled.

The chief point which the Apostles asserted, was, that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, which they proved from the miracles he wrought, and the prophecies of the Old Testament, which
(as

(as above mentioned) were fulfilled in his person*.

And, indeed, it is obvious to the most common reader of the Old Testament, that it was the intention of the Almighty to raise up for men a glorious person, who should deliver them from sin and death, and who is denominated therein, “the Messiah, or Anointed One†.” But if we peruse that sacred volume with a due regard to the importance of its contents, we shall find the time expressly

* Acts, c. ii. v. 25. iii. v. 18—25. vii. v. 37. viii. v. 35. x. v. 43. xiii. v. 23, 27, 33—37, 40. xvii. v. 2, 3, 11. xxvi. v. 22, 23, 27. xxviii. v. 23.

† Dan. c. ix. v. 25, 26. Psalm. c. ii. v. 2. Isa. c. xlv. v. 1.

named,

named, when this glorious testimony of God's regard for the preservation of mens souls should take place, viz. before the sceptre departed from Judah*; a short time before the destruction of the second Temple†, which had been erected about four hundred and ninety years before, after Jerusalem had been commanded by Artaxerxes Longimanus to be rebuilt by the Jews, who had been carried into captivity on the taking of Jerusalem, and the utter destruction of the Temple of Solomon, and the spoliation of all the sacred utensils used there by Nebuchadnezzar,

* Gen. c. xlix. v. 10.

† Hag. c. ii. v. 7—9.

King of Babylon*; that he should be a son of Abraham†, and born at Bethlehem‡ of a Virgin§; and that he should be descended from the royal house of David||; that the Holy Spirit should be poured

* Dan. c. ix. v. 25—27.

† Gen. c. xii. v. 3.

‡ Matt. c. ii. v. 1—6. Luke, c. ii. v. 4.

§ Isa. c. vii. v. 14. Matt. c. i. v. 18, 22, 23. Luke, c. i. v. 35.

|| Psalm. lxxxix. v. 4. Isa. c. iv. v. 2. c. xi. v. 10. Jerem. c. xxiii. v. 5. Ezekiel, c. xxxiv. v. 24. Mich. c. v. v. 2. Matt. c. i. v. 1, 20 c. ix. v. 27. c. xii. v. 23. c. xv. v. 22. c. xx. v. 30, 31. c. xxi. v. 9, 15. c. xxii. v. 42, &c. Mark, c. x. v. 47. c. xii. v. 35—37. Luke, c. i. v. 27, 32, 69. c. ii. v. 4, 11. c. xviii. v. 38, 39. c. xx. v. 44. John, c. vii. v. 42. Acts, c. xiii. v. 34. c. xv. v. 16. Rom. c. i. v. 1, 3. 2 Tim. c. ii. v. 8. Revelation, c. v. v. 5. c. xxii. v. 16.

G

out

out upon him*; that he should begin to preach his doctrines in Galilee†; that through him the monstrous worship of false gods should be abolished, and an immense multitude of Gentiles should be brought from darkness into light, from the grossest idolatry to the worship of one true God‡; that he should lead a most exemplary life of universal holiness and

*. Isa. c. xlii. v. 1. c. lxi. v. 1. Matt. c. iii. v. 16. Mark, c. i. v. 9, 10. Luke, c. iii. v. 21, 22. John, e. i. v. 33.

†. Isa. c. iv. v. 1. Matt. c. iv. v. 12, 13. Mark, c. i. v. 4. Luke, c. iv. v. 14—16.

‡. Isa. c. ii. v. 18, 20. c. xxxi. v. 7. c. xlvi. v. 1. Zephaniab, c. i. v. 4—6. Zachariah, c. xiii. v. 2.

benevolence;

benevolence* ; that he should perform very many miracles beneficial to mankind† ; that because he did not appear splendidly clad, and pompously attended by a numerous retinue, he should be reviled, insulted, and disowned to be the Messiah by the Jews‡ ; and, finally, that he should be persecuted by, and endure the greatest indignities from them, and executed like the vilest criminal§. We

* Isa. c. xlii. v. 1—4. c. liii. v. 9. Psalm. xlv. v. 7.

† Isa. c. xxxv. v. 5, 6. c. lxi. v. 1. Matt. c. xi. v. 5. Luke, c. iv. v. 18. and many other passages of a similar purport, dispersed through the Gospels.

‡ Isa. c. liii. v. 1—4.

§ Isa. c. lii. v. 7—9. Dan. c. ix. v. 26.

find it also recorded in the prophetic part of the Old Testament, that he should arise from the sepulchre, before his body could be corrupted*; that he should ascend into heaven, and sit on the right hand of God†; and that his spirit should be poured out most miraculously upon his servants‡, which we accordingly find he did, when they were all assembled together on the day of Pentecost§. And what cannot but prove, beyond the least shadow of doubt, the

* Psalm. xvi. v. 9, 10. Isa. c. xxvi. v. 19. c. liii. v. 10—12.

† Psalm. xvi. v. 8. cx. v. 1.

‡ Joel, c. ii. v. 28, 29.

§ Acts, c. ii. v. 1—4.

truth and authenticity of these prophecies, is, that they are extant not only in the Hebrew language, (in which they were originally written) but also in almost every other language in the known world, so that every person of what denomination soever he may be, has now an opportunity of judging not only of the truth of these predictions respecting the coming of our Lord, and the events connected with him, but also of those which have been uttered concerning the sudden and vast propagation of Christianity *,

* Matt. c. xiii. v. 33, &c. Luke, c. x. v. 18.
John, c. xii. v. 32.

its perpetual duration*, the rejection of it by the Jews†, and the embracing of it by the Gentiles‡; the hatred of the Jews towards the professors of Christianity§, the very severe and barbarous persecutions they were to endure ||; and, lastly, concerning the siege and utter destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple¶, and the exquisite

* Matt. c. xxviii. v. 19, 20. Luke, c. i. v. 33.

† Isa. c. vi. v. 9. c. lxv. v. 1—17. Matt. c. xxi. v. 33—41. c. xxii. v. 2—10. Luke, c. xv. v. 11, &c.

‡ Psalm ii. v. 8. xxii. v. 27, lxxxvi. v. 8, 9. Isa. c. xi. v. 10—16. c. xliii. v. 1, 4, 6, 7. c. xlv. v. 22. Malachi, c. i. v. 11. Matt. c. viii. v. 11. c. xii. v. 21. c. xxi. v. 43.

§ Matt. c. x. v. 17—22.

|| Ibid. to v. 39, &c. xxiii. v. 34.

¶ Matt. xxiii. v. 37, 38. c. xxiv. v. 2, 16—19. Luke, c. xiii. v. 34, 35. c. xxi. v. 24.

miserics

miseries the Jews were to suffer*; all which circumstances it is impossible for men to foreknow of themselves, and which have been miraculously confirmed and established in the event.

Thirdly, The miracles performed after the apostolic ages by the

* Matt. c. xxiii. v. 34—39. c. xxiv. v. 21. See also Josephus, who was himself an eye-witness of these transactions, and who has left us a most affecting account of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the miseries the Jews endured during it. See Josephus de bello Judaico; especially the whole of the 6th book. See also Dr. Jackson's *Eternal Truth of the Scriptures*, book i. part 2. sect. 3. ch. 6, 10—13, who has fully shown how minutely the predictions concerning the Jews were fulfilled in the slaughter and dispersion of that nation, both during, and shortly after, the war with the Romans.

professors of Christianity, afford another proof of its truth and authenticity. These consisted particularly in casting out demons, as Christ himself had predicted *, which seemed to prevail more at that period than before, or since, in order that his divinity might be established, and his triumph complete throughout all nations.

This wonderful power, thus signally conferred by the Almighty on the faithful followers of Christ, continued in the world for more than two centuries after Christ's glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven, as appears from the testimony of several ancient

* Mark, c. xvi. v. 17.

fathers,

fathers, and especially from Tertullian* and Minutius Fælix†, who dare any of their persecutors to bring them a person possessed with a demon, whom they bind themselves solemnly to expel from such person, by only using the name and authority of Jesus Christ, which none of them could do, nor any of their ancestors, as we are informed by the author of the Acts of the Apostles, who tells us, that some men pretending to exorcise were beaten, and wounded, by a demoniac‡. The same fathers also state it as a fact publicly

* Apolog. c. 22.

† Min. Fælicis Octavius. c. 27.

‡ Acts, c. xix. v. 15, 16.

known,

known, that all demoniacs, that is, persons troubled with evil spirits, were terrified and confounded at the appearance of a Christian*.

To this may be added, that if we believe that human affairs are under the paternal care and direction of the Almighty, and especially those which relate to his honour and worship, it is impossible, and utterly incompatible with that goodness towards men which he every where exercises and displays, that he would suffer such an immense multitude of persons whose only end was to worship him in piety and holiness, to be led astray

* Tertullian. & Minutius Fælix ubi supr.

by untrue books. And, as among the many sects which have arisen and distracted Christianity, there is scarcely one which does not embrace either the whole of the books contained in the New Testament, or at least many of them, with a very few exceptions, which, however, are of no great moment; it is surely a great proof, a most pregnant testimony, that those books are worthy of being believed, that nothing can be opposed to them, which can in any degree shake their authority and veracity.

Some there are, it is true, who maintain that there are contained in the Gospel doctrines which
are

are not only impossible, but also
 dissonant to, if not subversive of,
 reason. The futility of this asser-
 tion (which, however, deserves
 not to be in any degree credited,
 or, I had almost said, even to be
 heard) is demonstrated, at first
 sight, by the immense multitudes
 of men, eminently conspicuous
 for their wisdom, learning, and
 the acuteness of their understand-
 ing, who have submitted to the
 authority of the New Testament,
 from the earliest ages of Christi-
 anity. We know that there is one
 God, who is most perfect, of
 immense power, wisdom, and
 goodness; that all things which
 exist were created by Him; that
 his

his paternal care extends to all things, and especially to men; that He is able to reward after this life those who obey his will; that we ought to restrain our sensual desires and appetites, and abstain from all evil; that all men, as being descended from one common parent, are related to one another, and, consequently, that they ought to love one another; all this we are taught and informed in numberless passages both of the Old and New Testament. But beyond this we neither know, nor can affirm, any thing for certain by the mere force or guidance of human reason: for who is there, of what consummate knowledge and wisdom

wisdom soever he may be, that can encourage the presumptuous hope, that he is able, from his own conjectures alone (unaided, and unassisted by any divine communications), to develope, or to understand the will of the *Almighty* from the nature of those things, which *He* wills freely?

It has been also objected, that there is frequently an incongruity, or discordancy of expressions in the Gospel. But in opposition to this assertion I would observe, that whoever will investigate and judge this subject calmly and dispassionately, he will find, that in addition to the arguments which have been adduced and urged for the authority

rity and authenticity of the New Testament, this may be subjoined; that in circumstances containing in themselves any important point of doctrine, or of history, there is every where the same concurrence, and congruity, which is a thing seldom, if ever, to be met with in any of the profane writers of the same sect; while, on the contrary, the writers in the New Testament inculcate every where the same tenets, or articles of belief, give the same precepts, and the same account of the birth, life, miracles, suffering, death, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension into heaven, of Jesus Christ; the substance is every
where

where the same, although, at the same time, it must be acknowledged, that there are some few circumstances, which are, however, of no great importance, in which they cannot be reconciled : yet this very circumstance ought to acquit those writers from every suspicion of deceit, as, it has been generally observed, false witnesses relate every thing so artfully and compactly, that not the least specious difference can appear.

But if from every discordancy, or incongruity, how trifling, or irreconcilable soever it may be, whole books, which for above seventeen centuries have stood the severest test of criticism, and have
 been

been received as sacred, are to lose and forfeit all their authority and authenticity, we ought not, then, to give credit to any book, especially if it be historical; and in that case all the most eminent profane historians of antiquity, whose writings are by no means exempt from these disagreements, must lose their whole authority with us, and all our confidence in their veracity, respecting the facts they narrate. How much more reasonable and just is it that this circumstance should not destroy the credit of the writers in the New Testament, who we see, from their own writings, were men of the strictest piety and most desirous of truth?

H

There

There are also many testimonies, although, after what has been already stated, it may perhaps appear unnecessary to insert them, which confirm various parts of the historical books of the New Testament. The crucifixion of Christ, for instance, and the miracles wrought by him and his disciples, are mentioned both by Hebrews and Pagans. Mention is also made of Herod, Pilate, Festus, Fœlix, John the Baptist, Gamaliel, and the destruction of Jerusalem, in the writings of Josephus, which were published about forty years after the death of Jesus Christ, with whom agrees what we find in the Talmudists of those times.

times*. The barbarous persecution of the Christians by Nero, has been recorded by Tacitus as above mentioned†. There were also formerly extant books written by individuals, as by Phlegon, and also public acts to which the Christians often appealed‡, containing an account of the star which appeared in the East at the birth of Christ§, as also of the very remarkable eclipse of the

* Vid. Grotius de veritate Religionis Christianæ. l. 3. § 14. p. 165.

† Annal. l. 15. c. 44.

‡ "Eum mundi casum relatum in arcanis vestris habetis." Tertullian. Apolog. c. 127.

§ Vide Grotius de veritate, &c. l. 3. § 14. p. 166. not. 2.

sun*, which happened at the time our Saviour was ignominiously crucified.

No farther objections, one would think, can be urged against the New Testament, unless perhaps it be this, viz. that it has not retained its pristine purity. It must be confessed (and it is the common fate not only of this, but also of all other ancient books),

* "About the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, happened the greatest eclipse of the sun that had ever been known before: the sixth hour of the day was turned into darkness, so that the stars appeared in heaven, and a great earthquake in Bithynia overturned many houses in the city of Nicæa." Trallianus Phlegon, in l. 13. Chronic. five Olympiadum. cited by Eusebius in Chronico. See also Origen adversus celsum. l. 2.

that

that by the carelessness of copyists, or a mistaken accuracy, very many letters, syllables, and even words, have been altered, omitted, or added : but it is absurd, on account of this diversity of copies, which cannot but happen in the course of many centuries, to raise controversies respecting a particular book or passage, since both custom and reason require, that should be preferred which the most numerous and most ancient copies show. It is impossible for any one to demonstrate that all the copies of the New Testament are vitiated by mere cunning, or any other means, and especially those parts which contain any doctrine or

point of history : for both documents, and witnesses, of those times are wanting to prove it ; and if any thing has been urged more forcibly against the authenticity of the New Testament, by the most inveterate enemies of Christianity, it ought to be considered rather as the effusion of their malevolence, than as a testimony. This, one would think, would be a sufficient answer to those who object the variations or alterations of the scriptures, as a proof of their not being authentic, especially as they ought to make good their assertions against those writings which have been so long, and so widely, received as sacred. It has been already

ready shown that the books which bear the names of the Apostles, contain nothing but facts, which could not be controverted, and that they were of their genuine writing: having premised this, it necessarily follows, that there cannot be any other books attributed to them; and consequently, that these objections or assertions are unfounded. Nor is there any remarkable part that has been falsified, or changed: for as such alteration could not but have some particular end in view, the part so altered must vary considerably from the other parts which were not altered; a circumstance which is nowhere to be met with in the New

Testament; on the contrary, there is, as above mentioned, a wonderful concordance, or unanimity, which pervades the whole: and, as soon as any of the Apostles published a book, there is no reason to doubt but that the Christians would, with a laudable zeal for preserving and propagating the truth to posterity, take many copies of it, which were again multiplied and dispersed wherever the Christian name was heard, especially through Europe, Asia, and Egypt, in which countries the Greek language was cultivated, and several of which original books of the New Testament were preserved to the second century. But it is impossible

possible that any book, of which so many copies had been taken, which were preserved with the greatest care, not only by the piety of individuals, but also by the churches, should be falsified. To this may be added, that in the ages immediately succeeding, these books were translated into the Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Latin languages, most of which versions are extant at this day, and vary in no point, or matter of importance, from the Greek books. We have, moreover, also extant, the writings of many early Christian fathers, who were taught either by the Apostles themselves, or by their immediate disciples, and who

who cite very many passages from the books of the New Testament in the same sense in which we now read them, and in whose works, as it has been more than once observed, if the New Testament were lost, it might be wholly retrieved : nor was there any one of how great authority soever he might be in the church, to whom it appeared necessary to alter any thing. After these times, there were many other men of great learning and discernment, who, as I have already mentioned, after a careful and critical investigation of these books, received them as being authentic, and as having continued in their original purity. And here

here what I have above hinted respecting the different sects of Christians, will again apply, viz. that all of them, or at least those who acknowledge God to be the creator of the world, and Christ to be the author of a new law, receive and use these books as we do at this day. Besides, had any one of them attempted to interpolate any part, the others would have immediately detected their forgeries. Nor as to what relates either to select parts, or to the whole of the New Testament; can we (as it has been already observed) suppose it consistent with the goodness and beneficence of that Almighty God, “ who desires not the death

“ of a sinner, but rather that he
 “ should repent;” that He would
 permit such immense multitudes
 of men, bent upon piety, and
 seeking sincerely their eternal sal-
 vation, to be led away into that
 error, which (notwithstanding all
 their utmost precaution) from their
 infirmity they cannot wholly
 avoid.

Such are the proofs of the neces-
 sity and truth of the Christian re-
 velation of which I have endea-
 voured to exhibit a brief and com-
 prehensive view. The result of the
 whole is this :

That the Gospels contained in
 the New Testament are true in
 deed ; that they present to us a
 full

full and circumstantial account of the birth *, life, doctrines, miracles, ignominious death †, and glorious resurrection of Christ from the dead ‡, and his ascension into heaven, where he sitteth on the right hand of God §; that they, as well as the other books which constitute the New Testament, may be depended upon as the genuine productions of the disciples of Christ, who, being not only eye-witnesses of, but also, (if I

* Matt. c. i. v. 20, 23.

† Mark, c. xv. v. 25. Luke, c. xxiii. v. 33.
John, c. xix. v. 18.

‡ Matt. c. xxviii. v. 5, 6. Mark, c. xvi. v. 6.
Luke, c. xxiv. v. 56.

§ Mark, c. xvi. v. 19. Luke, c. xxiv. v. 57.
Acts, c. i. v. 9.

may

may use the expression) *principal performers* in, the facts they record and attest, could not but be thoroughly acquainted with the truth of them ; and who, had those facts been untrue, would never have gained that implicit and universal belief which prevails by far among the greatest part of mankind to this day. It follows, therefore, that the Gospel is really true, and may be depended upon (as also may the other books of the New Testament), as showing to men the only way to salvation through Christ Jesus.

The duties enjoined to men by the Gospel are by no means difficult, and the superior purity and sanctity

sanctity of its precepts, not only in things concerning the worship of God, but also in those relative to other matters, afford a most convincing proof of the excellence of the Christian religion over every other religion, past, present, or to be devised. This will appear in a variety of instances.

1. The Pagan sacrifices, as we are informed by very many writers both ancient and modern, were replete with the most sanguinary cruelty and obscenity*. The Jewish

* Porphyry de abstinentia. l. 2. § 27, 34—36. Tacit. Annal. l. 14. c. 3. Cæsar de bello Gallico. l. 6. c. 21. Plutarch, in his Life of Marcellus Oper. vol. i. p. 229. Lactantius Divin. Institut. l. 1. c. 21. Acoſta's Historia Indica.

Jewish religion contained nothing that was either forbidden or indecent ; but lest that nation, ever prone to idolatry, should fall off

Indica. l. 5. c. 19. Plutarch *Quæstiones Romanæ*. Quæst. 3. Liv. Hist. l. 22. c. 57. 1 Kings, c. xviii. v. 28. Lucan. *Pharsal.* l. 1. v. 56, 57. Potter's *Antiquities of Greece*, vol. i. p. 193, 331, 344—348—9, 407. Arnobius *adversus Gentes*. l. 5. p. 169. Ed. 1661. Diogenes Laertius, l. 3. §. 39. Strabo. l. 8. p. 581, 11. p. 805. 12. p. 837. 16. p. 1081. Ed. 1707. Herodotus. l. 1. c. 199. Athenæus *Deipnosoph.* l. 13. c. 6. Lucian. *Oper.* vol. ii. p. 658. Ed. 1687. Valerius Maximus, l. 2. c. 6. § 15. Herodot. l. 2. c. 46. Strabo. l. 17. p. 1154. Euseb. *Preparat. Evangel.* l. 2. c. 6. Varro apud Augustin. *de Civitate Dei.* l. 7. c. 21. Plin. *Historia. Naturalis.* l. 18. c. 1. Cicero in *Oratione pro Fonteio* : besides which, there are many other authorities which might be adduced, to recite whose names would be tedious, and perhaps unnecessary.

from

from the worship of the one true God, it was burthened with a multitude of ceremonies, which contain in themselves neither good nor evil; such are, for instance, the sacrificing of cattle, circumcision, and several other ceremonies, which are of no moment. But the Christian religion teaches us to worship God with a pure mind*, and those works, which in their own nature are most decent, although without the law†. Thus, it does not require the circumcision of our flesh, but of our appetites and desires ‡;

* John, c. iv. v. 24.

† Rom. c. xii. v. 1. Phil. c. iv. v. 8.

‡ Rom. c. ii. v. 28, 29. Phil. c. iii. v. 3.

that we should not abstain from all work, but only such as is unseemly *; that we should not consecrate to God the blood, or the fat of animals, but that, if it be necessary, we should offer our own blood, as a testimony of the truth †; and that, whatever portion of our goods we bestow on the poor, we should consider it as given to God ‡; that we should not abstain from certain kinds of food, or diet, but that we should use both with that moderation which agrees with

* 1 Cor. c. v. v. 8.

† 1 Cor. c. x. v. 16. Heb. c. xii. v. 4. 1
Pet. c. ii. v. 21.

‡ Matt. c. vi. v. 4. Luke, c. xii. v. 33. 2
Cor. c. ix. v. 7. Heb. c. iii. v. 6.

our health*. But the chief article of religion is every where in the New Testament described as consisting of a pious confidence†; by which, being led to a faithful obedience toward God‡, we rely on Him alone§, and trust in his promises||; whence arises hope¶, and a true love of God, and our

* Luke, c. xxi. v. 34. Rom. c. xiii. v. 13. Ephes. c. v. v. 18. Gal. c. v. v. 21. 1 Tim. c. v. v. 3. 1 Pet. c. iv. v. 3.

† Vid. John, c. xii. v. 28.

‡ Luke, c. xi. v. 28. John, c. xiii. v. 17. Rom. c. i. v. 5. 1 Cor. c. vii. v. xix. 1 Pet. c. i. v. 12.

§ Matt. c. xxi. v. 21. 2 Tim. c. i. v. 12.

|| Rom. c. iv. v. 20. 2 Cor. c. 7. v. 1. Gal. c. iii. v. 29.

¶ Rom. c. viii. v. 24. c. xv. v. 4. Heb. c. vi. v. 2.

neighbour* ; which causes us to obey his precepts, not servilely, through the impulse of a fear of punishment†, but that we may please Him‡, and have in Him not only a Father§, but also one who will reward us according to our deserts ||. We are, moreover, commanded to pray ¶, not indeed for wealth, honour, or other things, which, how much soever they may be coveted, are of no profit or advantage to very many; but that we may avoid all temptation, and

* Gal. c. v. v. 6. 1 Thessal. c. iii. v. 6.

† Rom. c. viii. v. 15.

‡ Heb. c. xii. v. 28.

§ Rom. c. viii. v. 15.

|| Colos. c. iii. v. 24. 2 Thessal. c. i. v. 6.

¶ Matt. c. vi. v. 10.

Lead a life of holiness and purity, in order that we may attain that blessed immortality, which Christ hath promised to all who faithfully and truly believe in Him, and fulfil all his commandments.

2. The duties required of us with regard to our neighbour are nearly similar to these. While other religions breathe nought but wars, intolerance, bloodshed, and revenge, and, in short, every calamity that can scourge mankind, the laws of Christ expressly prohibit us, how greatly soever we may have been injured, “to set
“ourselves against the injurious
“person*,” in order to retaliate

* Matt. c. v. v. 38.

on him that injury which we have received. He also expressly commands us to do good, not only to the virtuous and good, but also to the wicked; and “to love our
 “ enemies, to bless them that
 “ curse us, and to pray for them
 “ that insult us and persecute us,
 “ that we may approve ourselves
 “ to be the children of our hea-
 “ venly Father, who causeth his
 “ sun to arise on the evil and the
 “ good, and showereth down rain
 “ on the just and the unjust *.”

3. While almost all the ancient Heathen nations indulged themselves in the most shameless immo-

* Matt. c. v. v. 44—5.

rality and adultery, the Christians were (and are) expreffly, reſtricted to one wife*; and whoſoever gazeth “on a woman to luſt after “her, hath already,” as our divine Saviour hath announced to us, “committed adultery with “her in his heart†.”

4. Other laws forbid perjury; but the law of Chriſt commands us not only to abſtain from all ſwearing‡, but alſo to conduct ourſelves with ſuch a ſtrict regard to veracity, as to render it utterly unneceſſary to require an oath of us§.

* 1 Cor. c. vii. v. 2.

† Matt. c. v. v. 28.

‡ Matt. c. v. v. 33—37+ James, c. v. v. 12.

§ Matt. ubi. ſupr.

5. Nor is there, indeed, any thing excellent to be met with in the philosophical writings of the ancients, or in the sublime sentences of the Hebrew Prophets, which is not to be found in the New Testament, and sanctioned by divine authority. Such are, for instance, those fine precepts concerning modesty *, temperance †, goodness ‡, purity of morals §, prudence ||; the duties of

* 1 Pet. c. iii. v. 3.

† Tit. c. ii. v. 12. 1 Tim. c. ii. v. 9.

‡ 2 Cor. c. vi. v. 6. Galat. c. v. v. 22. Coloss. c. iii. v. 12. 1 Cor. c. xiii. v. 4.

§ Phil. c. iv. v. 8. 1 Tim. c. ii. v. 2. c. iii. v. 4. Tit. c. ii. v. 7.

|| Matt. c. x. v. 16. Ephes. c. i. v. 8.

rulers.

rulers and subjects*, of parents and children†, of masters and servants‡, of husbands and wives§; and especially those divine precepts concerning the avoiding of vice, and particularly the lust of honours and glory ||. But the last, and greatest, which is equally admirable for its sublimity, and its solid

* 1 Tim. c. ii. v. 2. 1 Pet. c. ii. v. 13, 17.

† Coloss. c. iii. v. 20, 21. Ephes. c. vi. v. 1—4.

‡ Ephes. c. vi. v. 5—10. Coloss. c. iii. v. 22—25.

§ Ephes. c. v. v. 22—25, 28, 33. Coloss. c. iii. v. 18, 19. 1 Tim. c. ii. v. 12.

|| Matt. c. xviii. v. 4. c. xxiii. v. 12. Luke, c. xiv. v. 2. c. xvii. v. 14. John, c. v. v. 44. Ephes. c. iv. v. 2. Coloss. c. ii. v. 18. c. iii. v. 23. 1 John, c. ii. v. 16. Phil. c. ii. v. 3. 1 Theff. c. ii. v. 6. 1 Pet. c. i. v. 24. c. v. v. 5.

brevity,

brevity, is, that we should love God and our neighbours as ourselves*; that is, in other words, “to do unto all men as we would they should do unto us†.”

Finally, if we look into the ancient Heathen writers, we shall find that several of the philosophers, poets, and priests, taught that the souls of the virtuous and pious (after they had been purified from the stains they had contracted during life) enjoyed the pleasures of Elysium for a certain limited space, and then returned to

* Matt. c. xxii. v. 37—39. Luke, c. x. v. 27. Rom. c. xiii. v. 9—11. Galat. c. v. v. 14. James, c. ii. v. 8.

† Matt. c. vii. v. 12. Luke, c. vi. v. 31.

life in other bodies. The absurdity of this doctrine is obvious to, and must strike, the most common observer. How contrary is it to that blessed Immortality, which is every where inculcated in, and which we are taught to expect from, the Gospels, and the other parts of the New Testament, when “this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality *!”

If we search the writings of the ancients, we shall find many maxims and precepts corresponding with those above enumerated; but in no one instance shall we meet

* 1 Cor. c. xv. v. 53.

with

with any that are enforced and inculcated with that pious and devout seriousness, and that solicitude for the preservation of mens souls, which universally pervades the New Testament.

Much has been urged in favour of reason, as being of itself sufficient to direct men. We have seen the deplorable state of gross idolatry into which the most polished and most enlightened nations were plunged at the time our Saviour came into the world to redeem mankind from sin and death; yet they enjoyed in its fullest extent, what is usually denominated the light of reason. The Pagan nations, of the present age,
are

are also, as we are informed by our latest navigators, enveloped in the grossest ignorance and idolatry; yet they, too, possess the same faculty. These circumstances alone are sufficient to show the inefficacy, and inability, of mere human reason, unassisted by any divine revelation to direct men to the worship of the one true God. Our own experience tells us, that we, whose ideas are more enlarged, who possess far greater advantages than any of those nations, in that we have the Gospel to guide and direct our weak, uncertain, reason; our own experience tells us, I say, that we are still extremely prone to evil, and cannot, with the strictest guard

guard over our passions, avoid it. How careful, and how circumspect ought we then to be, not only in all our actions, but in all our thoughts, lest we at any time add to the multitude of sins already recorded against us! We have the book of eternal life in our hands, the way is before us, and it is our fault alone if we do not follow it: for, as our divine Saviour has himself most justly remarked, much will be expected from him who possesses much. This reflection cannot be too frequently, and too seriously impressed and inculcated in our minds, especially, as from the uncertainty and instability of human affairs, we know not when

the hour will come, “ in which
“ the heavens shall pass away
“ with a great noise; and the ele-
“ ments, being set on fire, shall be
“ dissolved, and the earth, and its
“ works, burned up* ;” when we
shall be summoned to give an ac-
count of ourselves, and of our ac-
tions before the judgment-seat of
our blessed Redeemer and Media-
tor, Jesus Christ: “ to whom
“ be glory for ever and ever.
“ Amen†.”

* 2 Pet. c. iii. v. 10.

† Gal. c. i. v. 5.

THE END.

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